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Peihotien

Lim Han-ci: The Father

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moments, but it is their father whose example continues to guide their lives. Their mother was only a woman and died; their father created for the family a reputation and standards that survive in his name. He became a symbol of what the family could and should be, and as a symbol he is still present—as much a reality as he was when alive.

Lim Han-ci's wife was a fortunate woman in one respect. The first child she bore her husband was a son, Lim Hue-lieng. A bride comes to her new home as a complete stranger, both to the family and to her husband. For the first year or two she has the duties of, and little more status than, a servant. She is expected to release her mother-in-law from the drudgery of cleaning and cooking, bring her morning tea, help her dress, and see to her comfort in every way. In the days of Lim Han-ci, a bride also had the humiliating task of washing her mother-in-law's foot bindings and rewrapping the twisted, deformed feet. She was expected to serve her father-in-law's meals whenever he wished them, with her eyes lowered and her mouth shut. Unless summoned to fill his pipe or perform some other service, she avoided his presence. To her husband, a man whom she had not met until the day of her marriage, she was also subservient. If ill temper prompted him to beat her, she must accept it without complaint. She was expected to provide his meals, keep his clothes in order, and, in the old days, make his and the rest of the family's cloth shoes. Above all, she was expected to provide the family with a son—the means of continuing their line of descent. The life of a bride today is considerably less onerous, but there has been no change in the family's primary requirement of her. Until she produces a son, she has no secure place in the family. Bearing a girl at least gives evidence of her ability to bear children; the birth of a son ends the anxiety in her husband's family and gives her at last an undeniable status in it.

Probably Lim Han-ci's next child was a girl, but for this I must rely on hearsay and my knowledge of other village families. During our first weeks in the village, Lim Chieng-cua spent nearly as much time interviewing us as we did interviewing him. As a result he had a fair knowledge of what Chinese practices were not common in the United States and a cunning instinct for the kinds of things we were not to be told about his own family. He was extremely cooperative in explaining the idiosyncracies of other family genealogies and the disposition of their unwanted children, but in theory the gods had not blessed his family with any unwanted children. His neighbors, how-